



PRESS RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH SHOWS SPORT-BASED RESILIENCE TRAINING IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENT BOYS

Teenage athletes who undergo two hours of sport-based mental health literacy and resilience training enjoy better wellbeing and are better equipped to deal with life's setbacks, according to new research.

The results of a study in the January 2021 issue of the journal of [*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*](#) has shown that Movember's [Ahead of The Game](#) programme has been proven to increase wellbeing and resilience among the adolescent boys who took part.

The training course was tested on 350 boys aged between 12-18, across three different sports including soccer, rugby league and swimming, over a season-long period.

Teenage boys who took part in the Australian-led study - the biggest of its kind in the world - demonstrated a better understanding of what mental health is, had greater intentions to help others who have a mental health problem and were more confident about seeking help themselves if they needed to.

The study's principle investigator Stewart Vella, senior lecturer at the School of Psychology at the University of Wollongong, Australia, said: "Sport is a really great way of engaging young men. It's not school for a start, which is really important to them.

"Giving young men the skills to cope with a mental health problem is really important as we know that half of all mental health problems have their onset before the age of 14.

"We really need to equip young men of that age to be able to deal with these challenges. Doing it through sport is a really engaging way to do that."

Comprising of both face-to-face workshops and online training, it is thought to be the only programme of its kind that demonstrates both efficacy and carries no evidence of harm.

It can be adapted to all sporting codes and takes place in community sports clubs. It also targets parents and sports coaches, teaching them how to spot the signs of poor mental health.

The Aussie-led program has attracted global attention - including pilots with grassroots rugby union clubs in the UK, hockey clubs in Toronto, and a partnership with the Rugby League World Cup 2021. Closer to home, last year Movember partnered with youth suicide and prevention organisation ALIVE and Queensland Rugby League to deliver Movember Ahead of The Game across 25 community clubs, as well as to five under-15 AFL teams

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through St Kilda Football Club's Next Generation Academy, comprising 125 players, 15 coaches and 200 parents.

Owen Brigstock-Barron mental health program lead at Movember, said: “Ahead of The Game is an innovative programme which is aimed at athletes, their parents and their coaches.

“Involving the whole community enables us to create a supportive environment for young athletes that improves their overall understanding of mental health problems. It’s no longer something they have to deal with alone.

“The course takes place in the changing room, as soon as the players come off the field - it’s a space they feel comfortable and relaxed in.

“It explores mental fitness and resilience which not only helps them be a better athlete but has the potential to increase their ability to bounce back when things get tough, which is a really important skill to learn for outside sport and for later in life.”

He added: “The majority of mental health problems start before the age of 14 so we hope that by intervening early and teaching boys the skills to be able to cope with setbacks and build their resilience, it will prevent minor issues from becoming bigger problems later in life.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has meant the last few months have been very tough on everyone but the lack of routine, disruption to education and loss of organized sport could have far-reaching implications for adolescent mental health. That’s why programmes like Ahead of The Game are so important because they improve understanding of mental health problems and provide strategies for dealing with them.”

It has been estimated that approximately 65 per cent of Australian children participate in organised physical activity outside of school hours at least once a week. ⁱⁱ

Previous research has shown that taking part in organised sport during adolescence is associated with a 10-20 per cent reduction in risk for mental health problems compared with teens who drop out of sports. ⁱⁱⁱ

It is also associated with a 35 per cent reduction in suicidal thoughts among boys and 39 per cent fewer suicide attempts among boys who participate in team sport. ^{iv}

To find out more, visit aheadofthegame.org.au

ENDS

Crisis support can be found at Lifeline: 13 11 14 | lifeline.org.au, or Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 | kidshelpline.com.au

Media contact: PR & Comms Manager, Sam Mills: sam.mills@movember.com / 0411 241 475

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About Movember

Movember is the leading charity changing the face of men's health on a global scale, focusing on mental health and suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer. The charity raises funds to deliver innovative, breakthrough research and support programmes that enable men to live happier, healthier and longer lives.

Committed to disrupting the status quo, millions have joined the movement, helping fund over 1,250 projects around the world. In addition to tackling key health issues faced by men, Movember is working to encourage men to stay healthy in all areas of their life, with a focus on men staying socially connected and becoming more open to discussing their health and significant moments in their lives. The charity's vision is to have an everlasting impact on the face of men's health. To donate or learn more, please visit movember.com

ⁱ A controlled trial of an intervention for mental health literacy and resilience through organised sports: Ahead of the Game (Vella et al). https://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Abstract/9000/An_Intervention_for_Mental_Health_Literacy_and.96260.aspx

ⁱⁱ Source: AusPlay Focus: Children's participation in organised physical activity outside of school hours <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/ausplay-focus-childrens-participation-organised-physical-activity-outside-school-hours>

ⁱⁱⁱ Youth sport as a context for supporting mental health: Adolescent male perspectives, (Vella et al) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321008972_Youth_sport_as_a_context_for_supporting_mental_health_Adolescent_male_perspectives

^{iv} Psychobiology and behavioral strategies. Physical activity, sport participation, and suicidal behavior: U.S. high school students (Brown et al., 2007) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18046198>

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